

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 13472

FOLG RECD FROM CALCUTTA AS ACTION INFO BOMBAY, MADRAS
RPTD FOR YOUR INFO.

QUOTE.

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 2268

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: STRUGGLE OVER CHIEF MINISTER RAY'S REMOVAL

1. THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN CHIEF MINISTER RAY AND HIS ADVERSARIES
CONTINUED OVER THE PAST WEEKEND, WITH THE ADVANTAGE APPARENTLY
PASSING BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES. LATE FRIDAY AFTER-
NOON WE WERE TOLD THAT UNION MINISTERS CHATTOPADHYAYA AND MUK-
HERJEE, WHO WERE IN CALCUTTA, HAD CALLED A PRESS CONFERENCE FOR
8 O'CLOCK THAT EVENING AND THAT RUMOR WAS GOING AROUND THE CITY
THAT RAY HAD RESIGNED. THE PRESS CONFERENCE CAME BUT RAY'S
RESIGNATION NEITHER PRECEDED NOR FOLLOWED IT. CHATTOPADHYAYA
AND MUKHERJEE CONDEMNED THE SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN THAT WAS BEING
CONDUCTED IN THE STATE AND CALLED ON THE STATE CONGRESS AND THE
PEOPLE TO STAND UNITED BEHIND MRS. GANDHI. THEY DID NOT MENTION
RAY BY NAME BUT THE DIRECTION OF THEIR REMARKS WAS
CLEAR, FOR A
SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN IN SUPPORT OF RAY'S CONTINUATION IN OFFICE
HAD BEEN INITIATED IN CALCUTTA IN THE MIDDLE OF LAST WEEK.

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CHATTOPADHYAYA WAS THE MAIN SPEAKER AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE,

THUS PRESUMABLY MARKING HIMSELF AS THE PRIME CONTENDER FOR RAY'S JOB.

2. THE SCENE THEN SHIFTED FROM CALCUTTA TO DELHI, WHENCE THE PROTAGONISTS PROCEEDED THE NEXT DAY, SEPTEMBER 11, ACCORDING TO THE PRESS RAY WENT STRAIGHT FROM THE PLANE TO A 70 MINUTE MEETING WITH MRS. GANDHI; CHATTOPADHYAYA, MUKHERJEE, AND WEST BENGAL CONGRESS PRESIDENT MOITRA (ALSO A PRINCIPAL FIGURE IN THE OPPOSITION TO RAY) HELD THEIR OWN COUNSEL AND MET LATER WITH THE PRIME MINISTER. FURTHER MEETINGS WERE HELD THE NEXT MORNING. IN CALCUTTA ON SEPTEMBER 11 THE BETTING WAS THAT RAY WAS OUT AND THAT ALL THAT REMAINED TO BE DECIDED WAS WHO WOULD REPLACE HIM. BY NOON ON SUNDAY SEP 12, HOWEVER, THE ADVANTAGE HAD SEEN-SAWED BACK TO RAY'S SIDE AND INFORMED OPINION WAS THAT HE HAD GOTTEN A REPRIEVE AND WOULD STAY ON AT LEAST A LITTLE LONGER, POSSIBLY INDEFINITELY. RAY RETURNED TO CALCUTTA THAT EVENING, AND GETTING OFF THE PLANE ANNOUNCED THAT HE BROUGHT "GOOD NEWS": BENGAL POTTERIES (AN INDUSTRY CLOSED FOR OVER A YEAR NOW IN LOCK-OUT) WOULD BE RE-OPENED BEFORE THE PUJAS WITH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE CENTER. THE PAPERS MONDAY SEP 13 REPORTED THAT THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS EXECUTIVE AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WOULD MEET IN DELHI ON SEP 18 UNDER CHAIRMANSHIP OF MRS. GANDHI.

3. THIS PRESUMABLY MEANS THAT RAY HAS HIS REPRIEVE, AT LEAST UNTIL SEP 18 AND POSSIBLY BEYOND THAT. THE DETAILS OF ALL THIS TO-ING AND FRO-ING ARE INTERESTING MAINLY FOR THEIR COMIC QUALITY. MORE IMPORTANT IS THE LIGHT THE WHOLE AFFAIR CASTS ON THE MAIN PROTAGONISTS, RAY, SANJAY GANDHI, AND MRS. GANDHI. BY ALL ACCOUNTS CIRCULATING HERE, SANJAY INITIATED THE MOVEMENT TO OUST RAY AND HAS REMAINED BEHIND IT THROUGHOUT. RAY HAS FOUGHT OUSTER FIERCELY, REFUSING TO STEP DOWN UNLESS SPECIFICALLY SO DIRECTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER, AND DESPERATELY GRASPING AT ANY STRATEGY THAT CAME TO MIND (HE WAS SAID AT ONE POINT TO BE TALKING ABOUT CONVENING THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY TO HAVE A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE PERFORMED IN HIS FAVOR). MRS. GANDHI, BY ALL ACCOUNTS, HAS REMAINED UNDEPIDED, APPARENTLY TORN BETWEEN SANJAY'S WISHES AND WHAT SHE HAS BEEN HEARING FROM CHATTOPADHYAYA, MUKHERJEE, AND OTHERS, RAY'S DETERMINED RESISTANCE, AND CONCERN OVER HOW RAY'S REMOVAL WOULD AFFECT THE STATE'S FUTURE STABILITY. IN THE MEANTIME, WE LEARN FROM SENIOR OFFICIALS AT THE WRITERS' BUILDING, CONFIDENTIAL

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BUSINESS AT THE STATE GOVERNMENT LEVEL HAS GROUND TO A HALT; PAPERS HAVE PILED HIGH DURING THE PAST THREE WEEKS WHILE MINISTERS HAVE PLAYED POLITICS AND PERSONALITIES, AND DECISIONS ARE SIMPLY NOT BEING MADE.

4. IN THE COURSE OF ALL OF THIS IT APPEARS THAT RAY HAS WON HIMSELF A MEASURE OF PUBLIC SUPPORT AND ADMIRATION FOR HAVING STOOD UP TO THE CENTER AND TO SANJAY GANDHI. THOUGH AS WE HAVE

EARLIER COMMENTED RAY'S PERSONALITY HAS NOT MADE HIM MUCH LOVED
HERE IN THE PAST, HIS COURAGE IN TAKING ON THE CENTER HAS APPAR-
ENTLY STIRRED BENGALI RESENTMENT OF DELHI, ITS PAST REAL OR
IMAGINARY SLIGHTS AND INTERFERENCE, AND HAS STRUCK A CORD OF
SYMPATHY AND ADMIRATION FOR THE FIGHTING UNDERDOG. THIS MAY OR
MAY NOT HELP RAY WHEN HE AND THE REST OF THE WEST BENGAL CONG-
RESS LEADERSHIP CONVENE WITH MRS. GANDHI ON SEPTEMBER 18.
KORN
UNQUOTE. SAXBE

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